

7. Summary

Title: comparative investigation of character tests for their suitability in order to be able to correctly judge different forms of aggressive behaviour, as well as the hunting behaviour of dogs.

The Federation and Federal States have in recent years been intensifying the regulations for keeping dogs. The new dog regulations and laws include, among others, character tests for dogs which are categorised solely on the basis of the dog breed to which they belong as so-called “fighting dogs“ or “dangerous dogs“ and accordingly as aggressive and therefore dangerous.

In the investigation on hand tests were comparatively assessed along with two character tests from abroad („Dog mentality assessment“, Sweden, test for aggression in dogs according to Netto and Planta,) and the character tests from individual Federal German States (Rheinland–Pfalz, Nordrhein–Westfalen, Hessen, Saarland, Thüringen, Bayern, Sachsen, Brandenburg, Baden–Württemberg und Niedersachsen), also character tests from different breeding associations and organisations (Deutscher Retriever Club, Deutscher Klub für belgische Schäferhunde and Kuvacz–Vereinigung Deutschland), as well as a suitability test for visiting dogs in social institutions (Association „Leben mit Tieren“, Berlin) for their suitability, all aggression and hunting types, in particular to test the dangerous „transferred“ hunting behaviour of the dog.

For this an inspection catalogue in the form of a new classification of the various aggression and hunting types was developed, so that all test sequences of one type were able to be allocated without exception. Furthermore, it was necessary to newly define most types of aggression, as well as to develop and expand exact definitions for the three hunting types (hunting behaviour, bullying and „transferred“ hunting behaviour).

The results of this investigation showed that it was practically impossible and in some cases it also made no sense or was even counter productive to test all stimuli triggering aggressive and hunting behaviour. Also breed-specific features are not taken into account in any character test. It is presumed that a larger number of incidents with dogs takes place in the context of „transferred“ hunting behaviour, whereby it isn't always simple to differentiate aggressive behaviour from hunting behaviour. The investigated character tests do not do justice to this specific danger potential. Consequently we could conclude that most character tests are not sufficiently suitable to judge the individual dangerousness of a dog.

The most suitable test proved to be the „Niedersächsischer Wesenstest“, since, as well as selecting the test sequences to be carried out, it also includes the important

features: along with the veterinary examination and the additional (if necessary) tests of the dog on its own territory and the frustration tolerance test according to Schöning (2002), this test is, at least in Niedersachsen, carried out and accepted by vets who work in behavioural therapy. This character test is to be extended by a new test part to be supplemented, which initially tests the obedience of the dog with little outside distraction and then with increasing distraction by various stimuli already applied in the test. Moreover, a thorough anamnesis discussion should be held before each character test by a veterinarian qualified in behavioural therapy.

On the basis of the possible relevance to animal protection of some of the character test sequences which were investigated in this work and the actually comparably low percentage of dogs that became conspicuous (only 0.1 % of all dogs registered in Berlin in the year 2005 belonged to the so-called „list dogs“ that became conspicuous, which carried a breeding ban for such dogs: Pitbull, American Staffordshire Terrier and Bullterrier), it must be considered whether it is really justified to subject all representatives, for example, of these breeds listed above to a character test.

In order to reduce the risk potential dogs pose in the long term it is necessary for each dog owner to have been given a sound basic knowledge of dogs' behaviour and finally to take a dog licence test which is to be repeated annually. Moreover, it is also necessary to inform people who don't own dogs of how to deal with dogs properly. This should be taught on a national level in schools and kindergartens by specially selected and tested dogs based on the model of the Berlin Association „Leben mit Tieren“.